

GENDER, SELF, AND BRAND: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY ON GENDER IDENTITY AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

Lilly Ye, Frostburg State University
Lou Pelton, University of North Texas
Charles Blankson, University of North Texas

ABSTRACT

Gender is one of the most profound social factors that shapes and constructs our individual activities and group experiences. Yet, the influence of gender effects has been oversimplified in marketing literature that addresses gender as a singular biological descriptor (Palan 2010). In today's market place, gender concept is increasingly blurred as a result of rapid and turbulent social-economic changes since the 1960s. Practitioners are targeting emerging gender market segments based on this trend. Accordant with the social and market changes, marketing researchers are becoming increasingly sentient to the fallacy of a consonant biological approach to gender identity, and greater attention has been afforded to a more integrative approach for understanding gender as a multifactorial construct,

According to multi-factorial gender identity theory, gender refers to psychological features associated with physiological sex that are socially constructed (Spence and Helmreich 1978). The underlying assumption of multifactorial gender identity theory is that "gender identity is a combination of gender related phenomena, associated in varying degrees with each other, such as gender related attitudes, interests, and role behaviors, and gendered personality traits" (Palan 2001, p. 6). Gender identity plays an important role in consumer behavior, varying from facilitating information processing to connecting individuals to the rest of the world, and from orchestrating individual perceptions to developing attitudes about appropriate social behaviors (Fischer and Arnold 1994).

Based on multi-factorial gender identity theory, the study focuses on understanding consumers' gender identity from three perspectives, philosophical, psychological, and sociological, and explores the relationship between gender identity and consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). Gender has been widely used to create brand image and build brand relationships, and gender differences have been manifested across a wide variety of branding practices. Marketers use sex as an important segmentation variable to classify a product or a brand for either men or women. They also address the differentiation between "feminine" and "masculine" brand attributes to create powerful brand families in the marketplace. Gender, as a core self, has been used to create self congruity effect in consumers' product and brand consumptions (Sirgy 1986).

Gender and gender identity are defined by culture. The gender identity and consumer behavior research to date were conducted in Western cultures. It is important to incorporate cultural effects and investigate whether this relationship is significant across distinct cultural settings. As such, the study is especially interested in exploring the relationship between gender identity and CBBE in two different cultures: the U.S. and China.

An online survey was conducted to collect consumer panel data from 600 consumers in the U.S. and china. The results suggest that: 1). biological sex does not account for CBBE differences. The U.S. males and females don't show the significant difference in any CBBE constructs, while Chinese males and females are only different in terms of brand association, brand uniqueness, and brand loyalty. The findings suggest that biological sex is no longer a strong factor for enhancing consumers' brand perceptions; 2). Second, psychological gender traits profoundly influence consumers' brand connections. Specifically, femininity has a positive impact on both self-brand and functional brand connections for consumers in both countries, and masculinity affects self-brand connection for consumers in both countries; and 3). There is a strong connection among brand connections and CBBE. For both countries, a stronger self-brand connection can lead to better brand associations, more intense perceptions of brand uniqueness, higher perceived quality/value, stronger brand loyalty, and stronger brand attachment.

References Available on Request.